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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4511
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHMFIS/CJTF HOA

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 001122

NSC FOR MGAVIN, LETIM
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: MARR MOPS PGOV PINR SU

SUBJECT: FIGHTING IN BENTIU RAISES CONCERNS OVER PRIVATE ARMIES IN SOUTHERN SUDAN

¶11. (SBU) Summary: On October 2, Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces loyal to Deputy Chief of Staff Paulino Matip and bodyguards of Governor of Unity State, Brig. Gen. Taban Dang Gai clashed in the town of Bentiu resulting in the death of sixteen people and twenty-one injured. GOSS press statements claim the clashes between the units were a "misunderstanding." A number of GOSS and UN officials visited Matip on October 2 to request he get control of the SPLA forces loyal to him. The situation is now calm in Bentiu, but there are reports that different SPLA units may be reorganizing. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) On October 2, clashes between SPLA forces acting as bodyguards to the Deputy Chief of Staff of the SPLA, Paulino Matip and the Governor of Unity State, Brig. Gen. Taban Dang Gai erupted resulting in the deaths of sixteen people-twelve SPLA soldiers and four civilians, including one child-and twenty-one injured - seventeen SPLA soldiers and four civilians. Tensions in Bentiu remained high on October 2, although the situation calmed down over the weekend. The airport in Bentiu was closed, and all UN and other organizations locked-down and elevated to Level IV.

¶13. (SBU) Reasons behind the clash are still speculative. Minister of Interior Paul Mayom told the press that the clashes were a result of a "misunderstanding between the SPLA forces guarding Matip and those guarding the governor." Matip publicly stated that he believed the governor was trying to bribe SPLA troops loyal to him (Matip) in Bentiu and bring them over to the governor's side. Some claim that the clash was a result of pressure and attempts to remove the current governor. While others believe Matip's continued reliance on a large private army for protection incited the clash.

¶14. (SBU) On October 3, SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations General Mabutu Mamour led an SPLA delegation to Bentiu to try and resolve the dispute between the two SPLA factions. UN officials in Bentiu report that the delegation failed, as they were unable to persuade the commander of Matip's forces to come to Bentiu for a meeting to resolve the crisis. The UN reports that the commander and his forces refused to return to Bentiu for talks for fear of their lives as the SPLA made no guarantee for their safety. Mamour and his delegation returned to Juba on October 5 without success.

¶15. (SBU) UN officials have been meeting with Matip since October 2 to try from Juba to resolve the problem . However, they believe that Matip's position is hardening, following statements by Salva Kiir on October 4 regarding a need to move forward with SPLA transformation and the disbanding of all private armies, including Matip's. UN officials expressed serious concern as they believe any attempts to go after private armies in Bentiu, Mayom, Mankien, and similar locations will have direct repercussions on security in Juba.

¶16. (SBU) Comment: Recent clashes in Jonglei and Unity states

continue to raise concerns over armed militia and private armies throughout southern Sudan. While the GOSS is attempting to disarm the civilian population, they need to also consider how to bolster police presence in strategic areas that can respond and quell these eruptions. It is also imperative that the GOSS actually implement their policy to disarm and/or integrate the remaining private armies and militias into state security forces. If not, they will continue to pose a destabilizing effect for the GOSS.

ASQUINO